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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

13 June 1980

MEMORANDUMCUBA: A More Radical Bent in Latin America

The current trend toward more radical Cuban behavior in this hemisphere began in early 1979 when Havana realized that the revolution in Nicaragua was progressing much more rapidly than had been expected. Having already been caught off guard by the "revolution" in Grenada, the Cubans significantly increased their support to the Sandinistas in an effort to catch up with the pace of events. [ ]

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At the same time the revolution in Nicaragua was advancing to its successful conclusion, a negative trend was developing in many countries of the hemisphere that caused Havana to suspect that its cautious diplomatic approach over the past decade would pay only paltry dividends. Carefully cultivated relations with Venezuela and Peru deteriorated sharply, ties with Guyana took a turn for the worse, and events in Jamaica suggested that Prime Minister Manley--the object of considerable Cuban favor--might well be on his way out of power. Some friction developed even with Panama's General Torrijos and at year's end Cuba had to suffer the

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embarrassment of a prolonged and fruitless clash with Colombia for a seat on the United Nations Security Council. [REDACTED]

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The failure of legitimate diplomacy to bear fruit for Havana contrasted sharply with the success of those forces that followed the "armed struggle" line in Grenada, Nicaragua, and--in 1980--Suriname. Moreover, conditions in El Salvador appeared to increasingly favor the proponents of "armed struggle" and similar possibilities seemed to be developing in other areas. The lesson of the 1970s appeared to have been that armed struggle succeeded where diplomacy failed.

[REDACTED]

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Last fall, Cuba began to show signs that policy makers were beginning to look more readily toward violent revolution as a useful policy tool. At the time of the nonaligned summit, the Cubans pressed for the independence of the three French Overseas Departments (Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana) in the summit's final communique as well as in the press, suggesting that Havana was willing to sustain damage to its ties with Paris in order to gain prestige among world revolutionaries. Cuban propaganda organs began devoting more space to Haitian dissidents and to the situation in Honduras, depicting the Honduran military government in a derogatory manner that contrasted with the previous even-handed treatment. [REDACTED]

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Havana had entertained hopes that the Honduran military's leftward bent of several years ago would result eventually in a radical regime that would be acceptable as a Cuban ally. The turn-about in press treatment indicated that Havana had abandoned such expectations and looked to Honduras as an appropriate target of armed struggle. [REDACTED]

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The warm greeting that Havana accorded the M-19 terrorist group that seized the Dominican Embassy in Bogota, Colombia, indicated where Cuba's inclinations lay.

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The Cuban actions indicating an increased interest in the policy of violent revolution were occurring at the same time a shift was taking place in the upper levels of the Cuban policy-making apparatus. Hardliners, mainly members of the guerrilla elite who fought in the Sierra Maestra in 1957 and 1958 to overthrow ex-President Batista through violent revolution, were gaining President Fidel Castro's ear while those elements of the leadership who served as a moderating force on Castro seemed to have lost his confidence. Most significant in this trend was the reappointment of Ramiro Valdes as Minister of Interior--that part of the Cuban government that is responsible for internal repression and external intelligence operations.

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Valdes had previously served as Interior Minister from 1961 to 1968 and was noted for his ruthlessness in counter-intelligence and his promotion of the policy of "exporting the revolution." His replacement in 1968 coincided with a shift toward more pragmatic policies just as his reappointment in December 1979 coincided with the adoption of more radical policies.

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